

Be an Informed Consumer

- ▲ Be sure the business operator has a valid license issued by the Department of Consumer Affairs. Call toll-free to find out if a person or business has a current license issued by DCA.
- ▲ For information regarding the complaint history on a security-related business, call toll-free and ask for a history of any reportable complaints filed with DCA.
- ▲ Ask to see their certificate or license. The manager in charge of a repossession agency or alarm company should possess a valid "qualified manager" certificate. Private patrol operators and private investigators are required to have valid licenses and ensure that qualified managers are in charge of the businesses; however, their qualified managers are not issued certificates. Locksmiths are issued a license by DCA.
- ▲ Compare prices. Obtain three or more estimates for similar services.
- ▲ Know and understand what services are being provided before you enter into a contract. An alarm company must provide you with a written contract that includes the license number issued to the company, the approximate dates work will begin and end, and a description of the alarm system to be installed, as well as any other services to be provided once it is installed. Read the contract thoroughly and be sure you understand it.
- ▲ To find out how long a business has been established, you may contact your local Better Business Bureau. Contact your local District Attorney's consumer fraud unit for information on whether a business owner has been prosecuted for fraudulent practices in your community.

If You Have a Problem With a Private Security-Related Business . . .

Call DCA's Consumer Information Center toll-free for assistance with filing a complaint. Representatives at the Center will provide you with information and/or referrals to the appropriate sources, and can send you a complaint form.

The DCA Complaint Mediation Division acts as a mediator between disputing parties to promote a mutually acceptable resolution.

The DCA Enforcement Division investigates licensee conduct to determine if enforcement action is needed. Enforcement actions may be administrative, civil, or criminal actions against licensees. Unlicensed activity is monitored through the DCA Case Management Branch.

Additional Information

- ▲ Call DCA's Consumer Information Center toll-free for additional information. The Center accepts calls in English, Spanish, and more than 100 other languages.
- ▲ The Bureau of Security and Investigative Services Policy Office is located at 400 R Street, 3rd Floor, Sacramento, California 95814. Business hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Call DCA's Consumer Information Center toll-free at 1-800-952-5210.

In the Sacramento area call (916) 445-1254.



*California Department of Consumer Affairs
Bureau of Security & Investigative Services*

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**A CONSUMER'S GUIDE
TO THE CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
CONSUMER AFFAIRS'**

Bureau of Security & Investigative Services



DCA's Bureau of Security & Investigative Services

Crime prevention has become a major issue in our society. A greater burden is being placed on public police forces to respond to crisis situations. As a result, the consumer is turning to the private security industry to help protect our neighborhoods and businesses. The Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA), Bureau of Security and Investigative Services (BSIS) has jurisdiction over private patrol operators, private investigators, alarm company operators, repossession agencies, and locksmiths—all of which are private security-related businesses. Firearms and baton training facilities, as well as their instructors, also fall under BSIS' jurisdiction.

This brochure explains the role of BSIS in protecting consumers, through licensing and regulating the private security industry. It also gives tips on how to become an informed consumer before you obtain the services of a private security-related business and explains who to contact if you have a problem with the private security industry.



DCA Licenses Private Security-Related Businesses

DCA licenses private patrol operators, private investigators, alarm company operators, repossession agencies, and locksmiths, and certifies their training facilities and instructors. Licensing and certification ensures that the business operator and specific employees have passed a criminal background check and have met DCA requirements.

- ▲ **Private patrol operators** provide services to protect persons and/or property in accordance with a contractual agreement.
- ▲ **Private investigators** conduct investigations for individuals, businesses, attorneys, insurance companies, and public agencies within the areas of civil, criminal, and domestic investigations.
- ▲ **Alarm company operators** sell alarms on private or business premises and install, service, maintain, monitor, and respond to burglar alarms. These services are provided to individuals, businesses, and public entities.
- ▲ **Repossession agencies** repossess personal property on behalf of a credit grantor when a consumer defaults on a conditional sales contract that contains a repossession clause.
- ▲ **Locksmiths** install, repair, open, modify, and fabricate keys for locks. These services are provided to private individuals, businesses, and public entities. Individuals who duplicate keys from blank stock are not required to be licensed as locksmiths.
- ▲ **Training facilities** offer courses to private investigators, private patrol operators, guards, alarm company operators and their employees. Students are taught the proper carrying and usage of firearms and batons in relation to their licenses or registrations.

To find out if a person or a business has a current license issued by DCA, call toll-free 1-800-952-5210. In the Sacramento area, call (916) 445-1254.

Managers Must Meet DCA Requirements

Be sure that the manager in charge of the private security-related business is a DCA-qualified manager.

A *qualified manager* must pass an oral and/or written exam given by DCA, pass a criminal background check, and provide proof of qualifying experience in the security industry. A qualified manager is the responsible person for the business—the first point of contact when the consumer has a question about the services being provided. Locksmiths have separate DCA licensing requirements; however, the manager of a locksmith business is also the responsible person for the business and must pass a criminal background check.

Employees Must Meet DCA Requirements

Security guards cannot contract as sole proprietors—a private patrol operator must employ them. A security guard employed by a private patrol operator must pass a BSIS-approved powers to arrest exam given by the licensee, pass a criminal background check, and meet specific DCA requirements. Security guards must be registered by DCA and carry valid guard cards. If a security guard carries a firearm, baton, or tear gas, additional training is required, and the security guard must carry valid permits. Private patrol operators can work as security guards as long as they are qualified managers of private patrol operator-licensed businesses. All private security-related business employees under DCA jurisdiction must carry a pocket license at all times.